

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for years I have spoken out and voted against wasteful Defense spending that often serves to make us less safe and takes money from more useful programs. I am concerned that there is still too much money in this legislation for unnecessary weapons systems and other outdated holdovers from the cold war and too little to deal with the challenges of today. However, I am pleased that this bill takes some steps in the direction of reform, and I hope that it provides a platform for further progress.

I support this bill because it includes provisions from the "Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act," which I introduced in May and which were added in the Senate as an amendment by Senator KENNEDY. This bill will provide 5,000 special immigrant visas for each of the next 5 years to Iraqis at risk because they helped the United States, require the Secretary of State to establish refugee processing in Iraq and other countries in the region, and direct the Secretary of State to designate a special coordinator at the Embassy in Baghdad.

We need a wholesale change in attitude that puts the needs of Iraqis at the forefront of our Iraq policy, rather than using them as pawns in political games. It is ironic, to be generous, to hear President Bush repeatedly talk about the humanitarian crisis and massive out-flows that would follow what he called a "precipitous" withdrawal. This only illustrates the state of denial over the humanitarian crisis currently happening.

This is one area where our moral responsibility to these unfortunate people can be used to bring together those of disparate viewpoints in a cooperative effort that might serve as a template for how we solve greater problems associated with the war. One of the burdens of those who would be world leaders and the responsibility of those who make war is to deal with the consequences of their decisions. Innocent victims of war and civil strife are too often the invisible and forgotten casualties.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important legislation, and I commend my friend, Chairman IKE SKELTON for his leadership in crafting this bipartisan product.

I support this conference report because it focuses on the readiness crisis of the United States military and puts our men and women in uniform first and foremost. It will provide our soldiers in harm's way with the best gear and force protection possible. As a veteran of the U.S. Army and as the Representative for Fort Bragg, I support this bill that will provide our troops better health care, better pay, and the benefits they have earned.

America has the finest military in the world. Unfortunately, the current Administration's policies in Iraq have depleted our great military and put tremendous strain on our troops. Army readiness has dropped to unprecedented levels, and Army National Guard units have, on average, only 40 percent of the required equipment. And many stateside units are not fully equipped and would not be considered ready if called upon to respond during an emergency such as a hurricane.

This conference report helps restore our nation's military readiness by creating a \$1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund to address equipment shortfalls, fully funding the Army's and Marine Corps' equipment reset requirements and authorizing \$980 million to provide the

National Guard and Reserve critically needed equipment.

This bill protects our troops in harm's way by authorizing \$17.6 billion, an increase of \$865 million, for additional MRAPs vehicle armor, \$4.8 billion for anti-IED road-side bomb efforts, \$3.3 billion for up-armored Humvees, \$1.5 billion for add-on armor for other vehicles and \$1.2 billion for body armor.

The measure supports our troops and their families, by giving the military a pay raise larger than requested by the President, prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy program, and strengthening benefits for the troops and their families, as promised in the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century.

It includes the Wounded Warrior Act, which responds to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center scandal by improving the care of injured soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan—addressing many of the issues raised by the Dole-Shalala Commission and implementing several of its recommendations.

It improves accountability and cracks down on waste, fraud and abuse in contracting including requiring new steps to manage and oversee contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan and requiring detailed new regulations for private security contractors, such as Blackwater employees, mandating the appropriate use of force.

The bill also includes new bipartisan reporting requirements under which DOD will regularly brief Congress on the planning taking place to responsibly redeploy U.S. forces from Iraq. It incorporates the National Guard Empowerment Act, which gives the National Guard enhanced authorities to fulfill its expanded role in the Nation's defense, including authorizing a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, requiring at least one deputy of the Northern Command to be a National Guard Officer, and making the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the DOD. And it requires the Pentagon to include in its quarterly readiness reports the state-by-state capability of the National Guard to achieve its homeland and civil support missions, such as disaster response. The bill increases end strength by authorizing 13,000 additional soldiers for the Army and 9,000 additional Marines in FY 2008.

Significantly, this legislation provides all service members a pay raise of 3.5 percent, which is 0.5 percent more than the President's budget request, and increases monthly hardship duty pay to a maximum of \$1,500 (up from \$150 per month), and provides special pays and bonuses.

The bill will also upgrade military health care for our troops, veterans and military retirees. It preserves health benefits by prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy services for military personnel and retirees. It prohibits cuts in military medical personnel and fully funds the Defense Health program facility maintenance, particularly at Walter Reed. It extends VA health insurance for service members who served in combat in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities for five years instead of two years. And the conference report enhances benefits specifically for reservists.

I commend my North Carolina colleague Congressman DAVID PRICE for his work on contractor accountability, and I support the inclusion in this conference report of his legislation to crack down on waste, fraud and abuse in contracting.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more provisions of this important legislation worthy of support, and I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to pass it.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the conference report.

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the conference report.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

#### DIRECTING THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO CORRECT THE ENROLLMENT OF THE BILL H.R. 1585

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I send to the desk a concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 269) and ask unanimous consent for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

#### H. CON. RES. 269

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That, in the enrollment of the bill H.R. 1585, the Clerk of the House of Representatives shall make the following corrections:*

(1) In the table in section 2201(a)—

(A) strike "Alaska" in the State column and insert "Alabama"; and

(B) in the item relating to Naval Station, Bremerton, Washington, strike "\$119,760,000" in the amount column and insert "\$190,960,000".

(2) In section 2204(b)—

(A) in paragraph (2), strike "Hawaii" and insert "Hawaii";

(B) in paragraph (3), strike "Guam" and insert "Guam"; and

(C) add at the end the following new paragraph:

"(4) \$71,200,000 (the balance of the amount authorized under section 2201(a) for a nuclear aircraft carrier maintenance pier at Naval Station Bremerton, Washington)."

(3) In section 2703—

(A) insert "(a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—" before "Funds";

(B) in paragraph (4), strike "\$2,107,148,000" and insert "\$2,241,062,000"; and

(C) add at the end the following new subsection:

"(b) GENERAL REDUCTION.—The amount otherwise authorized to be appropriated by subsection (a) is reduced by \$133,914,000."

The concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.